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RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR A. V. SHULGIN
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-SECOND SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Distinguished Mr Chairperson,
Distinguished Mr Director-General,
Distinguished Delegates,

First and foremost, allow me to welcome H.E. Ambassador Andrea Perugini in his capacity as head of the Executive Council (“the Council”). We would like to assure you, Mr Chairperson, of our full support and readiness to engage constructively to ensure this year’s last regular session of the Council is as successful as possible.

In November, we will take stock of the results of the OPCW’s work in 2019. Admittedly, the Organisation is going through difficult times, and we are approaching the next Conference of the States Parties (hereinafter “the Conference”) with a substantial number of issues that have accumulated. I will address only the main issues.

Attribution. Nearly a year and a half ago, the illegitimate decision was taken by the will of a minority of States Parties to assign the once purely technical Organisation with functions completely extrinsic to its nature—those of attributing responsibility for the use of chemical weapons. The Russian Federation is categorically opposed to redrafting the OPCW’s mandate and infringing upon the exclusive authority of the United Nations Security Council.

However, this is far from being the only thing that raises our serious concern these days. The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) established within the OPCW bases its work on the dubious findings of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in Syria. I will touch on the work of this special mission separately. But the fact remains: the FFM reports—and we have multiple questions about several of them—are being used by the IIT. These reports leave little hope that the conclusions of the attribution mechanism will show any degree of objectivity.

We are also worried by the fact that IIT investigations are conducted behind the scenes and in a highly non-transparent manner. The States Parties receive almost no information about what this body is doing, are not informed of the methods and modalities of its work, the principles by which its staff is recruited, or even the scope of the IIT’s purview.

The recent briefing on Syria by the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) is a typical example. What did we hear? Nothing specific. Yet we were at a closed briefing and States Parties had the right to complete information about the IIT’s activities. As it turns



out, the IIT is an integral part of the Secretariat, and thus, as we know, reports to the Council; yet it works almost autonomously without any control from the executive body of the OPCW. This is absolutely unacceptable and violates the letter and the spirit of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”).

Now, the FFM. While both we and our Syrian colleagues recognise the importance and scope of work accomplished by the Mission, we have repeatedly criticised it. This is primarily due to its constant violation of the principles and provisions laid down in the Convention and the regulatory documents of the OPCW. Yet every time, we face a wall of misunderstanding and the refusal to engage in a substantive discussion on existing problems. For example, the investigation of the chemical incident in Douma of 7 April 2018. This raises a legitimate question: how shall we proceed with our work, how can we get to the truth if there is no openness and no readiness for dialogue? We would like to invite the delegations for a serious and thorough discussion on the work of the FFM under the respective agenda item. We stand ready for this.

A few words on other aspects of the Syrian chemical dossier. At the time, we supported the approach of the Secretariat on discussing a full range of issues within the framework of the Structured Dialogue. That said, it is important that all issues are considered in strict compliance with the requirements of the Convention and without any preconditions linked to the attribution novelties. But why are there such long breaks in the work? The initial impetus is lost.

At the same time, we welcome the intention of the Director-General to conduct another round of consultations with Damascus in the coming weeks. We hope they will bring progress.

Countering chemical terrorism. Russia has on many occasions highlighted the fact that the OPCW is not an anti-terrorist organisation in nature and thus has quite a limited toolbox for countering this threat. But even these modest tools are not used to their full potential, in our view. The OPCW has a Working Group on Terrorism and its Subgroup on Non-State Actors. What we hear at their sessions are presentations on the efforts that other international organisations are taking against terrorism, lists of conferences and workshops that members of the Secretariat attend, and so on. When will we start having real discussions on how to use our own potential?

Syria provides regular updates to the Secretariat on the activities of terrorist and extremist groups with access to toxic chemicals on its territory. Should the OPCW, designed to serve as a watchdog and provide a shield against the use and proliferation of chemical weapons, really work as an early warning mechanism? If the OPCW starts publicly discussing terrorist preparations, they will find it much harder to carry out their sinister plans.

We are deeply concerned by the way the work on the Draft Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2020 has been conducted this year. Consultations between States Parties and the Secretariat revealed major disagreements on the concept of the so-called omnibus draft decision. Like other delegations, we have said we cannot agree with the proposed omnibus decision bundle. The OPCW’s regular budget and allocation of the cash surplus are completely different things and should not be put into one basket. These are self-standing issues that are governed by different provisions of the Financial Regulations and Rules. Yet for some reason, it is being stubbornly carried out this way, while our concerns are being

ignored. The draft omnibus document is being submitted for consideration by the Council as if no other alternatives exist.

It is our understanding that the Council has a crucial role to play in the budget process. The decisions of this body serve as a point of reference for the Conference's work. The Council should issue recommendations regarding the Programme and Budget based on a consensus—and there is currently no consensus. We believe that the Council is simply not yet ready to adopt a decision on the whole set of budget-related issues. Consultations must continue during the intersessional period so that we can try to settle the problem ahead of the Twenty-Fourth Session of the Conference.

Another source of disagreements is the initiative put forward by the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Japan regarding changes to the Rules of Procedure of the Advisory Body on Administrative and Financial Matters (ABAF). Like other delegations in this room, we cannot agree with some of the provisions in the document submitted for consideration by the Council. First, we proceed from the inalienable right of the States Parties to appoint to the ABAF experts who, in their view, have the requisite qualifications and other necessary qualities. Second, the possibility of the *de facto* dismissal of any unfavourable expert from the body would set a precedent for other international organisations as well, and could undermine the status of the ABAF as an independent body designed to issue objective recommendations. When agreeing upon the Rules of Procedure of the ABAF, we advise considering best practices of the independent administrative and budgetary bodies of other international organisations. In this regard, we have submitted amendments to the draft document and launched a discussion with the sponsors of this initiative, as well as all other parties concerned, in an effort to achieve a consensus.

I would not like to conclude my statement on a negative note. The agenda offers a full range of issues for which we can achieve a consensus.

An important step was recently made toward bringing new hazardous types of highly toxic agents under the control of the OPCW. Two proposals are being submitted to the Twenty-Fourth Session of the Conference—one from Russia, and a joint proposal from the United States, Canada, and the Netherlands—regarding additions to Schedule 1 of the Annex on Chemicals to the Convention. We would like to use this opportunity to inform the Member States of the Council on the progress achieved on this issue during the intersessional period that will contribute to preparations for consideration of this matter at the Conference.

As for the other items on the agenda, the Russian delegation will make statements at this session as the respective agenda items are addressed.

I request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Ninety-Second Session of the Council.